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*If you know
a man in peace,
you know him in war.
Lord Moran*

Tribute to Ken Neptun

by Wendy Neptune

The following is from a letter written by Wendy Neptun, Midshipman Neptun's mother. She wrote of the family's reaction and transcribed Ken's words of encouragement to his younger brother not twenty-four hours after receiving the news that there were no options left to kill the leukemia cells...

"It became a very emotional family day. Dan, Carrie (Ken's girlfriend) and I took turns hugging, talking, and crying with Ken, and we told him how proud we were of him for being so brave these past 10 1/2 months. To us, he is a hero! He has endured so much: the terrible side effects of chemo, hair loss, mouth sores, diarrhea, nausea and vomiting, extreme fatigue, 7 spinal taps, 8 bone marrow biopsies, rashes, a

blood clot in his leg, multiple recent surgeries and lung biopsy. The list goes on... Yet, through it all, he never complained or said "Why me?" Instead he would say "Well, here is another bump in the road, but I will get over it!"

Our family has shed so many tears these past few days! And I know there will be many more to come. Yet, somehow in the midst of our sadness, we have an inner peace. I know that it is the "peace that passes all understanding" as described in the Bible. It is the peace and reassurance that when Ken does pass from this earth, that his spirit will not die! We have the assurance that Ken will continue to live in a much better place than planet earth! We also have the added assurance that we will join him in Heaven some day and live together forever. That is the assurance that we were given in the Bible: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him, will not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16

Just last night, Ken was talking on the phone with his younger brother (who was taking the news very hard). Ken was telling him: "Look, dude, all of us will die someday. You, or mom, or dad could get killed tonight in a car wreck. It'll be OK! I know that I am going to continue to live. I'll be there, in Heaven, to welcome you when you get there someday. I want you to go on living and be the best at whatever you chose to do."

I sat there (in his hospital room), with tears filling my eyes, as I listened to him talk to his brother. I was so amazed and happy to hear of his peace. I'm so extremely proud of him! There he was comforting his younger brother when he had received such devastating news just 24 hours earlier!!

I told Ken that I was going to write this letter and I asked him what he would like to tell everyone. This is what he said just a few minutes ago:

"Tell them this:

- I'm not afraid!

- My faith has grown an incredible amount with this challenge that I have faced.

- Back in May, I was not as appreciative of all the cards and Bible verses that people were sending me as I am now. I was not too interested and my faith was very shaky. I was having a hard time figuring out what I really believed. I wanted to believe, but I was unsure about my personal Christian beliefs. But now I am totally a believer! My faith is strong. I have peace. I appreciate all the people who have been praying for me and sending me cards, gifts, and emails.

- I have found that I am not able to plan my life. But God has the master plan for my life. It is He who makes the plans for everyone's life. I daily try to lean back into God's arms and trust His plan for my life.

- I still feel that I am living, not dying. Each day, until that day comes, I will still LIVE as well as I can.

- Like I said before, I am not afraid! My only concern is for my friends and family and the grief they will feel each morning and the tears they will shed at my passing.

- One of my comforts is that I will be there to welcome them when they arrive at the Pearly Gates."



Corbin Conference

by Midn 1/C Mitch Eliason

This October, the United States Naval Academy served as the host to the Inter-Service Corbin Conference. The conference provided midshipmen and cadets from various educational institutions with a forum for discussion on human relations and current issues affecting the military. The theme of "Resurgence of Civility and Patriotism in America" promised to enhance the development of the future military leader of character.

The conference is aptly named in dedication to an American hero. Margaret Corbin fought alongside her husband in the Revolutionary War. When he was wounded, she took over the manning of his cannon, firing it against the British at Fort Mifflin, PA. During the battle she was wounded, permanently losing the use of her left arm, while fighting for our nation's liberty. She served as a historical model for women when the service academies began integrating the genders. Since the 1980's the conference has evolved from issues of gender integration to broader themes in an effort to further develop the officer candidates.

The 2002 Corbin Conference focused on four main topics, each stemming from relevant issues in society and the military. The first was "Patriotism versus Arrogance." While the events of 11 September prematurely stole thousands of innocent lives, it did serve to stir up previously unforeseen patriotism in the hearts of Americans – but has this patriotism been twisted into discrimination? There have been sev-

eral incidents of gross misconduct towards Americans of Middle Eastern descent, solely because of their ethnicity. As servants of the nation it is imperative that military members boast a proud, but conscious patriotism that does not infringe on the freedoms of innocent men and women.

As the media's coverage reaches new arenas and television influences so many people across America, it has become rather easy to adjust the attitudes and stereotypes of Americans. For example, the coverage focusing on Middle Eastern terrorists may cloud the views of Americans toward members of our society that are Arab. This was the basis for the conference's second focus for discussion – "Communication based on Facts versus Rumors."

Margaret Corbin fought valiantly in combat for the ideals of her nation. Today there are women commanding warships in the Persian Gulf and dropping munitions from fighter aircraft over Afghanistan. This year at the Corbin Conference the focus was on "Gender Awareness" in this new type of war.

Immediately following the vicious attack on the United States, there was a strong sense of volunteerism. In many cities some of the nation's finest young men and women rushed to enlist in the military and offer their services. With the influx of this new generation, the manner in which war is waged has evolved tremendously. Mixing precision-guided munitions with special forces and platforms of unlimited capabilities has forced the military to become more versatile and therefore rely on these volunteers. This led to the final topic for discussion which was the "Values of Volunteerism."

The United States Naval

Academy hosted the Corbin Conference in October, and led a forum that provided those in attendance with worthwhile insights, and, most importantly, a plan of action to take back to their respective institutions for the enrichment of officer-development programs.

Corbin Mission

Since the establishment of the Inter-Service Corbin Council and Seminar, the forum has evolved over the years to include the larger issues of cultural awareness and intelligence, diversity, and the central officer traits of respect and civility. Traditionally, the Corbin Conference was established to provide an avenue in which the midshipmen and cadets of the United States Service Academies could talk about and present gender specific issues in the military, and to foster within each organization a sense of pride in the accomplishment of military women. The conference now takes on a slightly different focus to address new problems and issues that pertain to the officer development of midshipmen and cadets. This transition is targeted at finding ways to improve the atmosphere of military institutions and to ensure that upon graduation midshipmen and cadets are best qualified to assume the enormous responsibilities that await them. Today the Corbin Conference provides an atmosphere for men and women of the service academies to engage in intellectual conversation, to exchange ideas as well as to develop new ones, in a common effort to ultimately provide the Armed Forces of the United States with the most qualified military officers possible.

Leaders of Character

by Midn 1/C Austin Gullet

Going into my last summer as a midshipman at the Naval Academy, I was very excited to learn that I would be a HERO detailer. I always desired to be a part of Plebe summer as long as I had been a midshipman. I can still remember the upperclassmen that ran my Plebe summer and how they positively and negatively affected my views on leadership, life at the Academy as a midshipman, and life in general. I will never forget those men and women that helped lead my shipmates and me through plebe summer. From then on, I yearned to one day be in the position of authority to lead young men and women through the same experiences that once dominated my early life here at the Academy. I soon realized the most effective way to lead, was to first be a person of character.

The word HERO stands for Human Resource Education Officer. In each of the 30 companies which make-up the Brigade, there exist four HERO's, one per class. At the beginning of each academic year, the plebe class votes a fellow plebe within the company to be the HERO. Any plebe can nominate his or herself, as the position is strictly voluntary. As a HERO, one simply acts as a peer counselor. All HERO's attend training sessions throughout the academic year on how to handle stress-related problems common to all midshipmen. HERO's are also informed of the various specialists on the Academy, which midshipmen can speak with.

As 1/C and 2/C HERO's, you have the opportunity to teach

lessons to the plebes during Plebe summer. These lessons are designed by the Character Development Division at the Naval Academy. Naturally, when I heard of this opportunity I could not let it pass me by. I interviewed for the position and was selected along with three other 1/C and four other 2/C midshipmen. After the six-week military indoctrination period known as Plebe summer, every plebe had sat through six character development related topics taught by the HERO detailers.

The first lesson was simply an introduction into the HERO program, which entailed breaking down the roles of the HERO's within each company. The second lesson was on the Navy's core values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment. The plebes learned the verbatim definition of each word followed by an open discussion on why these words are the backbone of the Naval service. The third lesson taught was titled "Civility and Respect." In this lesson, plebes learned the difference between the two. They also learned that a person can be civil without necessarily showing a person respect, but in the military, it is part of your job to be civil and courteous to your subordinates as well as superiors.

The fourth lesson focused on "Selflessness and Altruism." During this lesson the plebes realized that by coming into the Naval service, they were now apart of something bigger than themselves. We also discussed the numerous times we as midshipmen need help and altruistic acts from our shipmates to make it through this place. The fifth lesson was titled "Warrior Ethos." This was a favorite among the plebes. During this lesson, the plebes realized that a warrior must be well rounded; one must be a stu-

dent of war, as well as one who looks for the most pragmatic way to attack a situation. Plebes were also taught that restraint was a vital component in becoming a modern day warrior. The sixth and final lesson was named after the ultimate goal of all midshipmen, "Officership."

This lesson was used as a review and wrap-up of the previous five lessons the plebes received. It was my chance as a HERO detailer to use some words of wisdom that hopefully the plebes could hold on to well after Plebe summer. I did this by laying the foundation for what I believed to be the best and most solid base in the development of any officer, being a leader of character. I told the plebes that as officers entrusted with sailors and Marines, we owe it to these people and to their families to lead them with integrity. As an officer, the number one goal is mission accomplishment, so it is imperative that an officer's subordinates work diligently and provide maximum effort when performing all tasks. I then asked the plebes if they would follow the orders of a superior that they did not trust. Most of them said they probably would to avoid trouble, but that when it came crunch time, it would be very difficult to genuinely follow a leader who lacks integrity. They then began to see that showing character instills trust in subordinates and this in turn means tasks are performed with diligence and missions get accomplished.

As officers entrusted with sailors and Marines, we owe it to these people and to their families to lead them with integrity.

The Moral Aspect of the Mission

by *Midn 2/C Jessica Mohamed*

Ask any new plebe what the mission of the United States Naval Academy is, and you'll undoubtedly receive this answer: "Sir the mission of the United States Naval Academy is to develop midshipmen morally, mentally, and physically..." In short, the ultimate goal of the four years of training by the shores of the Severn is to produce well-rounded, capable Navy and Marine Corps officers. The physical mission, training midshipmen to be in top physical shape, is accomplished by way of intense PT sessions, running, and mandatory physical activities. In regards to mental development, the professors manning the academic buildings ensure that each midshipman graduates with a Bachelor of Science. But how does the Academy ensure each midshipman possesses strong, personal convictions that aid in the success of the young student becoming a successful officer. The moral aspect of the mission is perhaps the most difficult to achieve; however, it is unquestionably the most essential of the three.

The Character Development division of the Naval Academy begins the introduction of the concept of "officership" during the arduous first six weeks of a midshipman's life, known as plebe summer. In addition to tough physical demands, endless memorizing, motivational speakers, drill, and as much stress the 2/c detailers can throw at a plebe, six lessons are taught by the character development division. The lessons are taught by 1/c and 2/c HERO's, yet another Navy anachronism stand-

ing for Human Resource Education Officer.

The six lessons emphasize that the goal is to develop the plebes into graduates of the Academy ready to take on the leadership of the country in both civilian and military roles. The four pillars of officership are: being a leader of character, a member of a profession, a servant of the nation, and a war fighter. I was one of the eight HERO's tasked with teaching the class of 2006 why they need a strong moral base to get through the Academy, and especially as an officer. I was pleasantly surprised at the attentiveness of the plebes as my partner and I gave briefs on such mature subject matter. The importance of being a leader of character was emphasized repeatedly because upon receiving a commission the former midshipman automatically receives incredible responsibility. However, the transformation from high school civilian to a leader of character does not happen at the moment when midshipmen covers are thrown into the air on graduation day. Character and moral integrity must be studied and conscientiously practiced so that upon putting on an officer's cover for the first time, the new second lieutenants and ensigns can rightly be called leaders of character.

In Lesson 4, the HERO's taught the importance of altruism and selflessness in a leader. As an icebreaker we asked the plebes to stand up and hold a conversation with the person next to them about the most amazing vacation spot in the world; but there was one catch: they were not allowed to use the words me, my, I, or myself. After not more than two minutes about 90% of the class was sitting down again. We wanted to show them how, even unselfconsciously, everyone thinks of himself or herself first.

Later, the HERO's would ask the plebes for an example of a selfless act they remembered in their lives. One memorable moment occurred when a plebe told of the selflessness of his mother. He had cancer when he was 5 years old, and his mother quit her job to stay by his bedside until he recovered. A few prior-enlisted plebes would share stories from the fleet or from the Corps with the group about a respected officer who put his men before himself and a disliked officer who did not seem to be concerned with the welfare of his subordinates. Unchanging from one class to the next was the overwhelming conclusion that everyone respects a person who will put other's needs over his own.

The concept of "Ship, Shipmate, Self" is a common theme emphasized throughout a midshipman's training at the Academy. The plebes readily grasped this message as part of the indoctrination of plebe summer. The plebes told the classes stories of their favorite detailers; inevitably they always had the highest respect for the ones who would take a risk to care for the welfare of the squad.

In the final lesson we summed up the concept of officership and gave plebes some personal words of wisdom on how to handle the rigors of the academic year. The detailers also asked the plebes for some feedback on their impression of the six, 45-minute sessions together. The most common response dealt with their realization of the importance and selflessness in the character of an officer. One very timid looking plebe had this to say, "I learned how much more important it is to impress the people underneath you, rather than the ones above you. In doing that, by taking care of your men, you are doing your job."

Who Wouldn't Love an Academy Grad

by *Midn 2/C Alexa Forsyth*

If you were to take a snapshot of all the parents' after Herndon, I assure you that you would never see such expressions of pride or admiration. Newspaper reporters and television cameras are only too excited to capture images of plebes covered in sweat, dirt, and, of course, lard—lots and lots of lard. Everything about plebe year suddenly becomes laudable and heroic after climbing that monument. Outsiders see the plebes as upstanding citizens and born leaders who have completed a right of passage. So, naturally, I made the assumption that everyone out in the fleet respected what I would go through during my four years at the academy. Who wouldn't love an Academy grad?

Apparently, "a lot of people" was the unfortunate answer to my question posed above. This sum-

mer on cruise, I learned the extent to which the Academy grads are not desired as leaders but rather dreaded as pretentious management.

The first time I stepped inside the CIWS shop, I was greeted warmly and with excitement. However, within the first two minutes I was accosted with a question that I have never before felt uncomfortable to answer: are you an Academy kid? When I responded with a smile that, yes, I was—my smile was only met with sighs and groans of disgust. It was definitely not the response I was accustomed to getting. I probed my enlisted running mates for concrete reasons as to why midshipmen from USNA were so loathsome. EN1 carped, "Academy kids think they know everything. They don't want to listen to experience—they'd rather just assume they know the answer. They have no interest in learning their job—all they want to learn is how to get promoted faster." GM2 claimed that, "Academy grads are not as easy going as ROTC grads. ROTC people tend to relate more to the crew because they had a more normal college experience."

I was blown away. I had chosen to attend the Academy instead of a ROTC program because I felt that it would prepare me to become the best officer—that I would be among an elite group of people who worked hard for four years, put up with all the trite rules and regulations, all with the knowledge that, somehow, at the other end of the experience we would all be better for it.

So, I was a little perturbed to find out that no matter how hard I work, or how well I take care of my future sailors/Marines, the first time that my subordinates find out

that I am from the Academy, I will already have a lot of stereotypes to disprove. The midshipmen that were paired up with running mates in the CIWS shop did a fantastic job of giving the enlisted crewmembers a different opinion of Academy people. Everyone stood his or her watch and was eager to learn how to take apart and clean the weapons. When watch standers would become weary, Midshipmen would volunteer to make soda and snack runs to keep everyone awake and morale up. By the time the ship reached port, we had all become a very tight knit group that laughed a lot together.

I am not exactly sure what happens between plebe year and graduation, but I do know that for many midshipmen, the "we" mentality definitely shifts into a "me" mentality. Somehow, during the four years quite a few newly commissioned officers suddenly move the focus of their leadership into solely caring about impressing those of higher rank. Enlisted personnel are not blind, and they know when their concerns are being glanced over.

In the Academy's defense, I do not think that the institution merely commissions snot-nose brats who are conceded and cocky. However, I do think that there are enough of the aforementioned type who DO graduate to make a substantial impression on the fleet.

During this plebe summer, HERO detailers worked ardently to teach the plebes about dignity, respect, civility, altruism, and selflessness—among other things. We tried to impress upon them, that no matter how small, everyone leaves an impression on people that he or she meets. True, cruise might only be a couple of weeks long, but if the en-



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A Lesson in Maturity at 92 mph

by *Midn 1/C Charles Nash*

Naval and Marine Corps Officers are required and more importantly expected to firmly uphold the law, set a good example, and do that which is right. It is just the nature of the job; it is the demand placed on the character of those select individuals. No profession requires more honor, courage, and commitment than that of a leader in combat. It goes without saying that none of us are fully prepared for this job on I-Day. If this were the case, four years and a lot of money would be wasted. Therefore, we must look at what exactly we are developing in midshipmen here at the Naval Academy.

The Mission clearly states that Midshipmen are to be developed “morally, mentally, and physically,” but what exactly does that mean? One might say, “I attend church regularly, I do well in my classes, and I work out daily.” But is that truly development? One of the most focused (and rightfully so) areas of discussion at the Naval Academy is character, or one’s ability to make sound judgment.

I believe that a lapse in good judgment does not yield weak or poor character, but rather immaturity. This is not immaturity in the common sense, but immaturity in the sense that the results of our poor decisions are not initially and outwardly realized. Maturity of character allows for an individual to see the bigger picture in terms of effects.

A personal example to all of us involves driving. We all like to get where we are going as fast as possible. For many of us, that means traveling at speeds in excess of the

posted legal limits. I myself am guilty of this. In the past, if I were speeding and I saw a policeman, the thoughts in my head ranged from “Whew!” to “That was close,” and so on. The instant increase in pulse rate and fear of being pulled over was enough to slow down for a while. However, as I drove for longer and longer, I found myself driving faster and faster. It got to the point that I would just drive as fast as necessary to overtake the traffic ahead of me.

Moreover, on trips that take several hours, it becomes easier and easier to drive fast. The math is simple: if you travel 70 mph vice 60 for a 420-mile trip, you will save an hour on the road. That was my logic, until I was recently pulled over by a Virginia State Trooper. He was very professional and appeared to be only a few years older than myself. We only exchanged a few words, but I spent a very pensive three hours driving after our meeting. During this time I discovered some maturity of character. I realized that as Officer Candidates, every time a lawman has to correct our behavior, we bring discredit to the services in which we serve. There is no tolerance for this type of behavior by officers in the Fleet, and luckily I learned that lesson as a Midshipman before it could have career implications.

It has often been said that the U.S. Naval Academy exists as a large leadership laboratory. However, as individuals decide on the validity of this statement, much more goes unnoticed. Many Midshipmen view Bancroft Hall and the Academy as a trap; around every corner is someone waiting to point out a behavioral or visible flaw. This unfortunate idea leads numerous Midshipmen toward the cynical views we so commonly see, partially

because some of the mistakes we make get us fried and even placed on restriction. However, this allows us to realize the significance of our behavior in a relatively sheltered environment, so that we may truly be prepared to be leaders of character.

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listed crew only sees midshipmen sleeping in berthing during the day, skipping watch, and taking a stand-offish attitude towards the crew—it is going to have an effect, a negative one at that. When questioned upon completion of the six HERO modules as to what they learned, a 4/C midshipman stood up and said, “I learned how important it is not to worry about impressing the officers above me. Instead, I should be more concerned with taking care of my subordinates and making sure they have a positive image of me, because not only will that create unit cohesion but also that in itself will impress the higher ranking officers and show them I am a leader of character.”

The plebes of 2006 had “ship, shipmate, self” drilled into them throughout the span of the entire summer. Maybe a few more years of midshipmen going out into the fleet and actually getting their hands dirty and seeing first hand how enlisted people interact with both good and bad officers, then the Academy might finally start to produce officers who by exemplifying the mission of the Academy are able to reverse the negative caricature of USNA graduates. Maybe someday soon, enlisted men and women will automatically assume they are getting a great new division officer if the Ensign is an Academy grad—instead of dreading the new officer’s arrival.

CAPT Coffee

by Midn 1/C Anne Gibbon

All too often, Americans question and criticize what they cannot see. The words in a history book have the same effect of those in a Stephen King novel; they sound interesting, but it is hard to imagine some of those events actually happening. Few events in our nation's history are harder to wrap our minds around than the experiences of the prisoners of war, especially those in Vietnam. The stories of the men who acted with such courage in places like Hanoi Hilton, a Vietnamese POW camp, are so hard to grasp simply because Americans cannot conceive of an experience so atrocious in our modern-day world.

For recent high school graduates who enter the Academy, their plebe summer seems to be the most trying experience they can conceive. The combination of the physical testing, stress, and constant sense of failure cause the plebes to

lose perspective and see their experience as more trying than it may be. One of the best memories from that summer for many plebes was the night Captain Coffee, a retired Navy POW from Vietnam, spoke; he made them realize why they chose to put themselves through a college experience unlike any other and to also appreciate and understand the sacrifices of their shipmates who had gone before them.

Midn 4/c Minikus responded to his speech by saying, "Captain Coffee's enthusiasm and optimism were contagious. Witnessing his speech forced me to re-evaluate the severity of my own problems; I realized how lucky I am to be at the Academy following in the footsteps of men like him. As a result, my attitude improved and my love for my country grew...I can only hope that if placed in a situation like the Captain's I will exhibit half of his valor."

Midn 4/c Broome, continues to be inspired by the faith and sense of humor the POW's exhibited even in times of extreme duress. "Listening to Captain Coffee's speech, images of pain, sorrow, and

torment went through my mind. I listened to him as he stood in front of my class and I realized that there is nothing in this world that one can go through and fail, if one has the heart and belief in that cause."

Captain Coffee's bravery and patriotism, along with those of his fellow POW's, inspired America during the Vietnam War, and his willingness to speak on the subject thirty years later brings history to life for a new generation of naval officers as well as a sense of duty to uphold the honor of the uniform which both generations wear.

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